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THE DOUBLE LOYALTY OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY¹

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The major task of all our theological seminaries is to prepare men for the Christian ministry. It is true that some men who go out from our seminaries will be diverted into other lines of religious service. A few become teachers; others are drawn into the cogs of ecclesiastical machinery in administrative functions for which they are peculiarly fitted. Here and there a man goes through some hard, unhappy experience in a parish and leaves the ministry altogether to become a radical free lance. But these men are in the minority.

The majority of the men who graduate from the seminary become the teachers and pastors of our churches. And whatever the inevitable disciplines and disappointments of their work, they will remain parish ministers to the end. This means that they will do their active work in the world and will make their contribution to the religious life of their time primarily through their identification with three or four successive groups of men, women, and little children to whom they minister.

¹ An address delivered at the opening session of the Harvard Divinity School and Andover Theological Seminary for the academic year 1919-20.

It should be perfectly apparent to every man who enters this office that he has a double loyalty. He has a loyalty, in the first place, to Christian truth, made known and to be made known to him in his own religious experience. And then he has a second loyalty to his fellow human beings with whom he lives and works. This double loyalty is by no means confined to the ministry. It is a part of every earnest life. It is the double loyalty of the doctor to the wide knowledge and high ethic of his profession and to the immediate human need of his patient. It is the double loyalty of the lawyer to the ideals of the law and to the concrete claims of his client. It is the double loyalty of the teacher to the absolute truth and to the immediate intellectual attainment of his pupil.

Now there is not and there never can be in daily life any perfect reconciliation of these rival loyalties. Students of the old Greek tragedies have often pointed out that the tragic element in those sombre dramas does not lie in a collision of good and evil. The moral problem would then be a simple one, without perplexity and poignancy. The essence of tragedy lies in a collision of loyalties, each of which is good in itself but which cannot be reconciled to the other in a given dilemma. In every tragedy, when choice and action become inevitable, there is always the sacrifice of a minor good for the sake of a major good, which involves the actor in a moral loss. The mother cannot square her loyalty to her husband with her loyalty to her children. The king cannot square his loyalty to the state with his duty to his family. In these homely but imperious dilemmas is found the essence of all tragic action.

There is no escape for any one of us from these tragic collisions in human life. Each one of us has to endure the moral friction which arises when his loyalty to truth, to duty, to the absolute good, cuts across his devotion to

family, friends, country, church. And it is the memory of values which have had to be relinquished, sometimes absolute, sometimes concrete, which makes up the deeper unhappiness and moral pathos of much of our human life.

There is no man in the world who has to feel this clash of loyalties more keenly than the Christian minister. He never perfectly squares his duty as a preacher with his duty as a pastor. He is, on the one hand, the spokesman for what is confessedly the most absolute idealism in the world — the uncompromising religion of Jesus Christ. He realizes as he reads the history of the church that most of the moral and strategic failures of Christianity have been due to the persistent ecclesiastical habit of underwriting the Christian counsels of perfection with permissive commandments, in which the moral austerity and therefore the creative energy of the gospel have been frankly “minimized” to meet the world as it happens to be. And the man of moral fervor and religious aspiration who knows his two thousand years of Christian history well, turns from its pages to his day’s work with the resolute determination not to sell out his distinctive spiritual heritage for a mess of pottage by way of a passing popularity. This is what George Tyrrell meant when he stood at the parting of the ways in his *Modernist pilgrimage* and said, “I am driven by a fatality to follow the dominant interest of my life, though it should break half the heart of the world.” There is no one of us in whom a pitiless and resolute utterance of this sort does not awaken an instant moral echo.

And yet this is not the only loyalty of the Christian minister. The man who ministers to his fellow men in religion becomes increasingly conscious of a paradoxical and rival duty to our very unideal human nature. He does not preach to a world where his absolute idealism is accepted or even generally understood. He feels at times

the mood of the ancient prophet who cried, "Ah, Lord God, they say of me, Doth he not speak parables!" And, always struggling against this stern devotion to truth, there is something within him bidding him to hear and heed "the still sad music of humanity."

It was Tyrrell himself who felt most poignantly the moral tragedy of his choice, and the consequent annihilation of many intimate and homely values which his course demanded of him. In the whole history of contemporary religious experience there is no passage so filled with the unutterable pathos of spiritual tragedy as are the sentences in which Tyrrell chronicles his own misgivings as to the final validity of his choice in turning his back upon his mother and sister, who sorely needed him, for the sake of the sombre austerities of the Society of Jesus:

"Well I remember my last day at home, my last day with those two now hid in death's dateless night, who were my share of the world, the best this life has had for me; whom I forsook — for what? in the name of all that is sane and reasonable! For a craze, an idea, a fanaticism? Or for love of and zeal for the truth, the Kingdom of God, the good of mankind? Had I been faithful to duty all along, had I worked hard at school and after, had I stayed at home and supported my mother and sister; and made their sad narrow lives a little brighter and wider, would not God have given me light, had it been needful for my salvation? And would not my chances of salvation have been better than they now are? Have I done so much good to others who had no claim on me, as to atone for my neglect of those who had every claim? What have I given up or forsaken for the service of God, as I suppose some would call it, except my plain duty. These are the pleasant doubts that fill my mind at spare moments and make me say, 'Surely, I have lived in vain!'"

This friction arising from the double loyalty of the Christian ministry creates for us all a moral problem to which we must give renewed thought. It gradually dawns upon a man as he lives and works that there is no cheap and easy solution of his dilemma. He comes at

last to realize that he too must be again and again the central figure in the ever-renewed moral tragedies of human life; that much of the comfort of his life will have to come from "the things that he aspired to be and was not," either as a preacher or a pastor. But it is not too much to hope that he may establish in the main some working relationship between these two loyalties, which will enable him to go on with his ministry in some measure of spiritual peace.

Our life in the academic world is devoted almost entirely to the quickening of our loyalty to religious truth. Perhaps it would be better to say to the intellectual and moral habit of truthfulness. For liberal Protestantism is not a body of clearly defined religious belief and practice; it is distinctively a religious method, a way of thinking and meeting the world. This cardinal virtue of sincerity has with us supplanted the older ideal of an immutable orthodoxy. And our theological disciplines, in so far as they bear ultimately on character and through character on the world, look primarily to the perfecting of this inner integrity, which we have come to know as sincerity. It does not matter very much what the stone may be on which a man grinds his soul to this cutting edge of a clean sincerity. One course in the curriculum may serve as well as another. None of our several departments has any prerogative in this matter. For the object of all our disciplines together is so to sharpen the mind and the conscience to the biting edge of keen sincerity that the conventions and orthodoxies and idols of the marketplace shall not blunt that edge when it is laid against them. The earnest mind of our own time will stand almost anything from a minister today if it can only believe that his soul has been tempered and ground to this rare, fine edge of a clean sincerity. The world will endure from him heresies and treasons which it would not tolerate for a moment from patently insincere men, be-

cause it knows instinctively that in such spirits has always lain and still lies the hope of its own salvation.

It is to be written down to the credit of most of our theological seminaries that they are now graduating into our ministry a body of comparatively sincere men. The Christian church may be unable to boast in our own time of some of the outstanding intellects and men of administrative genius who adorned and guided her in other days. But in some very real measure Robert Browning's prayer in *Paracelsus*, "Make no more giants, God, but elevate the race!" has been answered in the modern ministry. The level of sincerity has been tremendously raised in the last half-century. This is the net result of the whole modern critical method of theological instruction. And no honest man will minimize the clear gain to the Christian church in a ministry which, whatever its other patent shortcomings, is newly possessed by a spiritual integrity.

For all the too familiar strictures of the secular world upon the church, it remains true today that there is no great modern institution where men are as free to say what they really think as the pulpits of our liberal churches. There is still, alas, intellectual mediocrity and timidity and moral compromise left in the pulpit. But on the whole there is as little of it there as in any other great institution or profession. Unless a man is to dissociate himself altogether from the organized life of his time and live as an isolated mugwump, he may enter the ministry with the assurance that he will there enjoy an intellectual and moral liberty as great if not greater than that to be found in the law, in medicine, in teaching, in politics, or business.

Now no man would breathe a word of criticism or rebuke upon the on-going development of this newly felt devotion to sincerity. What Carlyle calls "the fixed indubitable certainty of experience" is in religion today

our primary moral obligation. But the man who goes into the Christian ministry needs also to be reminded, particularly at the outset of his work, that he of all men in the modern world has also a moral duty to humanity, to those — in the great phrase of the prayer from the Fourth Gospel — “whom God has given him out of the world.”

Most of the failures of the average minister in the early years of his pastorate, and some of the final tragedies of men who leave the ministry altogether, broken and discouraged, rise from the fact that sincere men become so absorbed in the statement of their major loyalty that they lose sight of human life to which they minister. They go out fired with a splendid passion to speak the truth, come weal, come woe, and they forget, what all Christian ministers ought to remember, that truth is always most potent in history when it is spoken in love.

There are, at the present moment, two contributory causes to this almost universal failure of the ministry to mediate its truth by means of a great charity for mankind. The first of these causes which lead to a neglect of our devotion to humanity, is the persistence in the pastorate of the scientific point of view, which dominates our religious disciplines today. In his recent volume of Gifford Lectures Professor Sorley says:

“Our intellectual interests fall into two distinct classes, according as they are centered in the universal or in the individual. In the whole region of what is called the sciences the interest in the universal is supreme. What we are in search of is general principles or general laws. Things and processes are not regarded as individuals or as interesting for their individuality — for what distinguishes them from everything else — but for what they have in common with other things and processes. The uniformity of nature is the supreme principle, and individuals are but examples which prove the law or cases which illustrate its operation.”

The aim of the modern science of religion is to discover for us the universal and reliable laws of the spiritual life.

There is not and there should not be for any one of us any escape from the most rigorous scientific discipline in religious history, in the classical literature of religious experience, in the development of the Christian ethic, and in the increasingly important body of religious psychology. But the just and inevitable prominence of the scientific method in our theological preparation for the actual work of the pastorate does bring with it a very real liability on the human side. This is the liability to ignore and neglect the claim of the individual to be in himself a centre of spiritual value.

This liability is not confined to the ministry. It is shared equally by the members of every other profession which rests upon a scientific training and point of view. We have become all too familiar in the modern world with the specialist type of mind which is primarily interested in human life as an interesting congeries of types, classes, and movements. There is the modern medical specialist, whose professional interest in a patient is confined to the diagnosis of the "case," so much more scientific fodder for the machine which grinds out universal laws. Darwin's complaint that he had become such a machine and had lost the power to care for poetry, music, and the drama, is a confession of scientific liability which has an increasing validity with the spread of the scientific temper.

There is, therefore, a very grave danger in the ministry that the measure of mastery over the general laws of the spiritual life, which the seminary genders, may become a liability in the pastorate, for the very reason that it has unconsciously trained us to regard our fellow men as of primary value because they may be neatly classified, ticketed, and put away in the card catalogue of our general knowledge. The newly ordained minister tends to find his people mainly interesting and important as individuals because they are more laboratory material

on which he may perform his intellectual operation. They are his first "cases." In other words, a genuine scientific interest in the laws of the spiritual life, so far from fostering a devotion to humanity, may often dissipate what the scientist chooses to regard as the miasma of personal affection.

But this is merely to increase for the subjects of the theological investigation an ill which is already too acute. What troubles the average man today is just this fact that nobody seems willing to treat him personally as a centre of distinctive and inalienable values. "No man cared for my soul," is the perfectly valid cry of the average man as he faces governments, industries, institutions, in the modern world. And from the world's indifference to himself it is not a far leap to the suspicion that God does not care for him individually; that God, like the scientist, is interested in types and species but careless of the individual. The greatest stumbling-block to the acceptance of the Christian religion on the part of the average thoughtful man today is his inability to comprehend and realize as a matter of personal experience Jesus' tremendous saying about the sparrow falling to the ground. This is a difficulty which is deeply felt and freely confessed by all men who have in any way been scientifically disciplined. "I see no reason," wrote Huxley, "to suppose, as Christianity asserts, that God stands to us in the relation of a Father, loves us and cares for us. . . . Science everywhere reveals the passionless impersonality of the unknown and the unknowable." And modern science has communicated something of this "passionless impersonality" to all the great modern professions. But for the Christian minister to face his fellow human beings as one more disciple of "passionless impersonality" is little short of a religious tragedy. He, of all men in the world today, ought to be the mediator and incarnation of the mind and heart of Jesus, to

whom every individual was a centre of unique and inalienable values.

And the other cause for the neglect in the modern ministry of a devotion to humanity is in some very real measure a reflection of the stress which is laid at the present moment upon the office of the prophet. The conception of the minister as a priest, that is, as a man who goes to God with the needs of the people on his soul, has almost disappeared from the ministry of our liberal churches. In so far as there is any model in Biblical tradition for our office, that model is generally said to be found in the Hebrew prophet. The recovery of Hebrew prophecy from the meshes of allegory and prediction is probably the most signal achievement of Biblical criticism. The moral energy released by the resurrection of these noble souls from their neglect and misunderstanding has led many a modern minister to covet for himself also the deep joy of coming to the world with the rubric "Thus saith the Lord." So to live and think that we may be the vehicle for religious certainty is one of the noblest ideals which we may covet for our office.

But as one reads the classical history and content of prophecy as it is found in the Old Testament, one is inclined to make certain reservations as to the entire suitability of this ideal for the modern ministry. What we sometimes miss in the prophets is just that gentle and patient charity by which St. Paul nurtured the early churches of his spiritual begetting. The Hebrew prophet was half political agitator, half itinerant evangelist. He was a religious teacher, but he was not a pastor. He came and said his prophetic word in all its majesty and simplicity, and then he went. His effectiveness was in part due to his detachment from his audience. He was a voice from another world. The tremendous effectiveness of this type of religious leader in history cannot be denied. But the conditions which made it effective in early times

are the very conditions which it is almost impossible to realize in a permanent pastorate.

The spectacle of Amos coming from Tekoa and prophesying in Bethel and returning again to the wilderness, is one of the most exhilarating in all religious history. But when we of the modern ministry try to play Amos to the modern world, we are crippled at the outset by the depressing conviction that we ourselves have been living in Bethel all the while, that we never have broken away to get the moral perspective of life as seen from Tekoa; indeed, by the suspicion that there may not be any wilderness of Tekoa left in the world. Tolstoi spent his life trying to get to Tekoa and never got there. He died, as he had lived, a citizen of our modern world-Bethel. In other words, the social conscience has widened since the days of Amos to include the prophet himself. There seems to be no point of absolute moral detachment and aloofness from the life of our age. And even if there were, men's tempers have changed, so that such a wilderness would seem to few men really a point of moral vantage. The problem which the modern preacher states is his own problem; the guilt which he ascribes to his age comes from his lips not as a scathing denunciation of others but as a halting confession of his own original sin as a member of modern society.

There is no more effective statement of this characteristic point of view to be found in contemporary literature than the preface to Shaw's play, "Major Barbara":

"When an enthusiastic young clergyman first realizes that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners receive the rent of sporting public-houses, brothels, and sweating dens, or that the most generous contributor to his last charity-sermon was an employer trading in female labor cheapened by prostitution, or that the only person who can afford to rebuild his church or give his boy's brigade a gymnasium is the son-in-law of a Chicago meat-king, that young clergyman has, like Barbara, a bad quarter of an hour. But he cannot help himself by refusing to accept money from anybody except sweet old ladies

of independent income and gentle and lovely ways of life. He has only to follow up the income of the sweet old ladies to its industrial source, and there he will find Mrs. Warren's profession and the poisonous canned meat and all the rest of it. His own stipend has the same root. He must either share the world's guilt or go to another planet."

It is just this widening of the circle to include the prophet himself which somehow makes the office of the modern preacher unlike that of the Hebrew prophet. The deeply religious man today will say with Browning's "Grammarians," "Oh, if we draw a circle premature . . . sure, bad is our bargain." And it is the shrewd suspicion that when the would-be prophet tries to draw such a premature circle of denunciation from which he begs to be personally excused, he does so either in ignorance of all the facts which go to the making of his own circumstances or else in deliberate Pharisaism. The number of men who are in the moral position to play Amos to the modern social order is almost negligible.

Now all this means that in so far as the modern minister sets up for himself the prophetic ideal as the norm for his office, he sets himself in a certain moral opposition to his people which is patently wanting in charity and which is actually unwarranted by the facts of modern life. For these facts compel the minister to admit that he also is a citizen of Bethel, no matter what his professional preference for Tekoa as a moral headquarters.

These two persistent causes then contribute at the present moment to the minister's failure in devotion to the men and women who make up his immediate world — first, a scientific interest in the universal laws of the religious life to the neglect of individual values; and second, a conception of the ministry as a kind of modern Hebrew prophecy calling for a moral detachment from society which is almost impossible of present attainment.

When we turn to the minister's development of this second loyalty to human nature we realize that it is only life itself which will reveal to him its claim to his consent. Men do not come easily and quickly, even in the Christian ministry, to the conclusion that persons are what matter in our world. This conviction comes as a kind of conversion with the ongoing of life itself. But it is reasonably certain that many ministers might spare themselves much of the persistent loneliness and unhappiness of their lives as well as some of its ultimate tragedies, if they determined in advance that their sincerity should be mediated to the world by charity.

When we begin to speak in this way we are at once suspected of counseling compromise, of suggesting a certain paring down and diluting of truth and truthfulness so that they shall be less offensive to the god-of-things-as-they-are, who is secretly worshiped by so many timid, lazy, and selfish persons. The word "compromise" is the ugliest word in the dictionary. And it is true that when a preacher begins to measure his words so that they shall match the immediate moral attainment of his hearers, his ethical fervor and his religious insight are imperiled. But, on the other hand, there is an hour in the history of sincerity when it may soon and easily sour into fanaticism or bigotry, and once a man's heart and mind are thus soured, he has lost the power, if not also the moral right, to speak to the vast majority of his fellow men about the things that belong to their peace.

Compromise is a kind of inglorious muddy mean between truthfulness and time-service. It is to be eschewed at all costs. What we all are seeking is an attitude which somehow grasps the two loyalties in a comprehensive vision, even though it may not reconcile them. Höffding is right when he says that the world comes to us with its hard and fast alternatives — "Either-Or" — and that in those moments it is the business of religion to help us

say "Both-And." The man who knows only one major loyalty of the ministry to a pitiless sincerity and whose ruling principle in every dilemma is "All or Nothing," may find himself led with Ibsen's Brand into futility as well as heartlessness. Or if there be in his attitude toward the fallen and despicable world a touch of relenting, that relenting may take the form of moral pity. Now pity is the virtue of an aristocrat. There is just that touch of condescension about it which goes so ill in a democratic age, and which makes it so unwelcome to those who are to be its beneficiaries. It will not do to pity the modern world of men any more than to ignore them.

What the average man needs when he starts in his ministry is to have his heart thawed out toward all sorts and conditions of men. "As a young man," wrote Mr. H. G. Wells the other day, "I affected the pose of the cynic; but I must now confess that at the age of sixty, and greatly helped by the War, I have fallen in love with humanity." That is precisely the experience which every minister must have, and the sooner after leaving the seminary the better. He is sound as to his major loyalty to truth. His knowledge of the content of religion is sufficient to cover the emergencies which he will meet as a "general practitioner." What is too often wanting is a perception of the homely human reality which is his parish, the intimate joys and sorrows of our common human life, its concrete perplexities and its inarticulate aspirations.

This is what F. H. Bradley means when he says in one of his later volumes, "It is not merely one of the doctrines of religion but the central doctrine, the motive of all religious exercise, that God cares for each one of us individually, that he knows Jane Smith by name, and what she is earning a week, and how much of it she devotes to keeping her poor old paralyzed mother." If this be the central doctrine of all religion, and it certainly is very

near the heart of Christianity, it is surely incumbent upon the Christian minister also to know Jane Smith by name and to enter in some measure into her life and struggle.

The problem of developing something more than a professional acquaintance with Jane Smith is a very real one. It is easy enough to recognize her name each time it turns up in the card-catalogue of the parish. For five dollars any one of the memory-system mongers who advertise in the magazines will teach us a system of mnemonics by which her name may be linked with her face. But this is only a poor beginning at the matter. Jane Smith will be pleased to be called by name at the second meeting. But the real problem is far deeper than that; it is to see life and to experience religion from Jane Smith's premises. Thus and thus only can her minister become to her a real teacher and pastor. And the man whose system of mnemonics sometimes plays him false will be forgiven by Jane Smith if only he speaks to her with insight and sympathy.

The Christian minister should learn to enter into the lives of those to whom he ministers by taking the simpler and deeper experiences of his own life quite seriously, as not exceptions to the common lot but rather as a clue to what happens to men and women everywhere, always, to all. The superficial conditions of human life are constantly in flux. Our sociological milieu is always changing. But underneath the shifting, superficial aspects of life there lies a deeper and unchanging drama of birth and death and love and work and play. The passing of the centuries changes this deeper lot of man little or not at all. And it is at this deeper level that the Christian minister really touches human life. Ancient custom and men's desire associate him with these more permanent and vital aspects of their experience. No ministry escapes for any length of time from some intimate share in these profound and homely dramas of our

common humanity. Now no minister who once senses this intimate and imperious element in human life, which remains almost static in spite of the vicissitudes of history, will ignore the teaching of these very elements in his own experience. He will not look upon his own profession as an exemption from the common lot of man. Rather, his own difficulties in relating his absolute idealism to the problems of his own family life, the regulation of his money affairs, his duties as a citizen in the State, his pleasures and recreations, all the gladness, perplexity, and sorrow of his own daily life, he will freely use as the direct teaching of his own personal experience to make him patient and gentle, as he brings his major loyalty to bear upon the men and women who make up his charge. Mark Rutherford says somewhere that he has often observed that the greatest help we get in time of trouble is given to us by some friend who comes to us and says quite simply, "I have experienced all that." Happy is the Christian minister whose unprofessional life is deep enough and broad enough, so that he can go to the world of men in their homely joys and sorrows and say, "I have experienced all that!" Such a word from such a man is worth all the formal creeds and codes of Christendom. If the minister is to be loyal to his people, to look upon them and to work with them in charity, he will first of all try to live simply and deeply himself, and then will fearlessly use his own more intimate experience as the open sesame into what otherwise will be to him "the secrets of many hearts."

Then while not relinquishing his prophetic passion to be, in his best moments, the voice of God, he will strive to become at the same time the voice of his people's better self. A man in the pews has said of one of our contemporaries, "He has the gift of putting into words for us what we have always wanted to say but never were able to say. And that is a very great gift." Perhaps we do

not wish to revive definitely the priestly function in our free churches; the priestly office lends itself so easily to ecclesiastical abuse. But there was something in the old idea that in the priest the people had an articulate voice for their better selves. So far as our free churches are concerned, it may be better to say that the modern minister stands to his parish in the relation of the research worker, the experimental investigator in religion. He is to work out for men and women who have neither the time nor the training to do so for themselves, a credible Christian creed and a practicable Christian ethic. But always in his wrestling with the religious doubts of his day he must include himself among the doubters; in his attack upon the broad social evils of his time he counts himself among the guilty; and into his bolder spiritual aspirations he welcomes his people not as spectators but as participants. The preacher today who takes his stand outside his congregation and preaches at them, no matter with what moral fervor and religious enthusiasm, will never really move the mind and will of his time. Shaw's bishop who says, "I am not a teacher; only a fellow-traveller of whom you asked the way. I pointed ahead — ahead of myself as well as of you," is really the most effective type of modern minister. The secret of a really useful ministry under present conditions is to be found in the tacit, perpetual suggestion both of a man's preaching and of his pastoral work, that he is himself one of the audience to which he speaks. Neglect of this subtle but absolutely fundamental distinction between the ancient Hebrew prophet and the modern Christian minister, will insulate all a man's good will toward his fellows and render it ineffectual.

Again, the preacher who wishes to understand more accurately the varied lots of all sorts and conditions of men will occasionally set out on what we may call the sociological adventure. In its characteristic contempo-

rary form this deliberate transfer of your life from one environment to another for the sake of social insight is a rather recent feature of our world. It is true that long ago John Woolman got off his horse and walked the roads of Jersey, that he might thus better understand the lot of the common laborer; that he traveled to England in the steerage rather than in the cabin, that he might share the squalor and discomfort of his less fortunate fellow passengers. But John Woolman was before his time in this as in many other matters. In recent years, however, this method of bridging the social gulfs has become one of the recognized means of establishing communication and understanding between those whose lots are superficially very far apart. Tolstoi among the laborers in the corn field, Jane Addams at Hull House, Thomas Mott Osborne in the solitary cell at Auburn prison, Charles Fleischer in the shipyard, Donald Hankey as a private in the ranks when he might have had a commission for the asking, all of them have been primarily interested to understand better the life, the interests, and the motives of great social groups other than their own — peasants, prisoners, slum dwellers, artisans, Tommies.

Now and again, particularly in the care-free years, it is a good thing for the Christian minister to go on one of these modern quests after the secret life of his fellow men. To be one with them even for a little while, to share their tasks and to eat their bread in the sweat of the common brow, is an illuminating experience. No minister who ever spent a casual week or a vacation month upon one or another of these adventures, inadequate as his experiment may be for any final pronouncement upon the problems he has met, counts such days as lost. They remain for him in all later life as shafts of light, penetrating what must otherwise be gross social ignorance. To do this thing occasionally immensely quickens one's charity for humanity. But life is too short and the

duties of the pastorate too many and exacting for us to hope to make the round of the world in this desultory way. And in the last analysis the minister is thrown back upon his own imagination to picture to himself the varied life and lot of man. If he is the man he should be, he can realize Jane Smith even more effectively in his own study than by merely working in her factory or taking lodgings in the squalid tenement over her flat.

The secret of a growing charity for mankind rests upon the development of the imagination. There is an old and familiar distinction between fancy and imagination, upon which the English poets of a hundred years ago harped with wearisome reiteration. Wordsworth and Coleridge wore the subject threadbare. But still vast numbers of supposedly educated men fail to make the vital distinction. Fancy is the flight of the mind released from all bondage to fact. It is our inner power to build air-castles in Spain and to picture "the light that never was, on sea or land." But the field in which imagination works is the field of hard fact, and the function of the imagination is to change a barren and bony fact into a warm and living human reality. It is the redemption and resurrection of all our statistics and surveys from the grave of indifference. It is the cry from the heart of us as we look out upon the laboriously gathered and pedantically compiled information of our time, "Lord God, can these bones live?" Imagination is, in short, the mind's inner power to get out of its immediate environment and to put itself over there yonder in the alien fact, and then to clothe that fact and breathe the breath of life into it and to make it live by that miracle as a part of one's own experience.

Every really great man has this power or this gift as an integral part of his greatness. Certainly all creative work rests upon this premise. Balzac says of himself in his relation to his characters, that he wore their rags,

walked in their tattered shoes, felt the pangs of their hunger and their tears pouring down his face. So the great Christian grace of charity rests, in the last analysis, not upon a multiplication of our own meagre experience to the *n*th power nor upon desultory social pilgrimages, but upon our ability to imagine how life looks to the other man. One of the profoundest utterances that was ever made about what we call the modern social problem is a chance remark dropped by an English essayist, "The broken link between classes in the modern world is a fundamental defect of imagination." It is this inherent inability of our great social groups to see the other man's point of view, which makes all our boards of conciliation and arbitration such poor social solvents.

The exercise of the imagination is very near to a religious function. Indeed it is utterly impossible for a man to put into practice the Golden Rule, the simplest of all Christian principles, without this ability to put himself in the other man's place as well as insisting that the other man put himself in our place. If we are to be men of real imagination, we must be unselfish men, not at the check-book level of an occasional easy benevolence, but at the deeper level of an inner unselfishness. We must be willing to get entirely out of ourselves, to perform that rare and almost superhuman feat of ignoring for the moment the familiar premises of our habitual creed and code, and in this moment of intellectual and emotional selflessness we must put ourselves over yonder in the other man's shoes and get the angle and feel of life from where he stands.

It follows hard after this statement, that every failure of imagination is in some real measure the result either of intellectual laziness or intellectual selfishness. There are a great many otherwise impeccable sermons preached in our churches, which are hopelessly vitiated by their lack

of imagination, that is, by the intellectual selfishness and idleness of the preacher, who uses the prophetic hour as an opportunity to discuss problems which interest him but which simply do not exist for the vast majority of men. Many of us preachers fall unconsciously, but none the less truly, under the woe which Ezekiel pronounced, "Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?"

There is nothing more striking in the Gospels than the strange and instant hold which Jesus had over all sorts and conditions of men. They seem to have felt that he understood them, that he knew in advance how life looked to them. Jesus' interlocutors never trouble to explain themselves to him. To do so would be an insult to his charity. They take his understanding of them for granted. And we must suppose that this direct understanding of humanity was in Jesus' case the result not so much of the extension of his own experience to cover the common lot, certainly not of any artificial and self-conscious "social settlement" sojourning with fishermen and publicans, but rather of an inner unselfishness, which fulfilled itself in an unfailing power of the imagination to enter into the other man's lot and need. It has been very plausibly suggested that Jesus' silence at his trial was the outcome of this quality of his mind; that he saw Pilate's position so clearly that there was nothing he could say in self-defense; that, Rome being what it was, he realized that Pilate had no option but to kill him. However this may be, we must feel that Jesus' power over our common humanity is a power which springs in part from his unswerving loyalty to an absolute idealism, but in equal part also from that other loyalty which is suggested by the characteristic and recurring word in the Gospels, "compassion." Compassion and sympathy — they are the same word, one the Latin, the other the Greek

derivative; they both mean experiencing life with the other person. There is no mention, there was no place in the life of Jesus, for the imperfect exercise of this loyalty in the patrician form of pity. Pity was an Old Testament prerogative of a divine Sovereign. Jesus did not pity humanity; he had compassion upon it, he sympathized with it. And one whole half of his power over mankind rests in the fact that we still say of him,

“O Saviour Christ, Thou too art man,
Thou hast been troubled, tempted, tried.
Thy kind but searching glance can scan
The very wounds that shame would hide.”

Such was the imagination of Jesus fulfilling itself in his distinctive grace of charity.

To try to live, therefore, in our inner world an unselfish life, is the secret of a deepening charity for men. To be persistently struggling to complement and correct our academic and professional view of life by Jane Smith's outlook, to share her work in imagination and to bear with her the burden of that paralyzed mother, is to put ourselves in such a relation to Jane Smith that we can really begin to be ministers to her, effecting some kind of contact between our high and holy truth and her humble concrete need. Mr. Wells has told us lately that “All the world is now Job.” It is equally true that all the world is Jane Smith. The minister who does not somehow supplement his theological disciplines by a parallel discipline of the imagination through poetry, fiction, drama, music, may have all theological knowledge and all faith so that he can remove mountains of contemporary agnosticism, and all the prophecies and gifts of tongues in the catalogue, but he will never be happy in the Christian ministry. His office will be to him first a baffling perplexity, then a grave problem, and finally a bitter dis-

appointment. Happy is he if he enters his life's work and labors at it, realizing that half his task is to win this rarest and most potent Christian grace of charity, and that the real secret of each day's working reconciliation of his rival loyalties to God and man rests in his growing power to speak the truth in love!